

It's not about You. It's about You.
Joining God's work in process:
Your Role as a Leader

Author*: Dr. Terri Elton (www.luthersem.edu)

Objectives:

- Understand key aspects of servant leadership and able to connect them with ministry leadership
- Understand the importance of balancing one's own role (agency) as a ministry leader with faith in God
- Learn some servant leadership skills and be able to exercise them in a ministry setting

Key Servant Leadership Ideas:

- Ministry is first and foremost about God and God's work in the world – therefore, my faith matters.
- We, as Christians, are given agency and invited to join God in God's mission in the world – therefore, my leadership matters.
- There are skills and practices that ministry leaders can develop to lead well - therefore, leadership is something to be developed and practiced.

Servant Leadership Skills:

Servant leadership skills and practices cluster around three categories: Administrative, communication and interpersonal, and ministry.

- *Administrative*
 - o Planning and organizing ministry
 - o Implementing ministry
 - o Logistics of ministry
 - o Creating a safe environment
- *Communication and Interpersonal*
 - o Reading the situation or ministry context
 - o Relating with people one-on-one
 - o Leading small groups
 - o Leading large groups
 - o Developing and carrying out a communication strategy
- *Ministry*
 - o Attentive to one's own journey of faith
 - o Nurturing and leading discipleship practices with young people – regarding Bible study, prayer, worship, service, etc.
 - o Helping others discover their own giftedness and create opportunities for using those gifts
 - o Creating practices for reflection on ministry activities

Core verses: John 21:15-19.

Opening:

Activity #1: Think about a time when you've experienced great leadership. Write down 5-6 key leadership characteristics that made that experience positive. Keep those characteristics in front of you throughout this session.

AND/OR

Activity #2: Think about a time when you've experienced poor leadership. Write down 5-6 key leadership characteristics that made that experience negative. Keep those characteristics in front of you throughout this session.

Transition:

Today we are going to talk about leadership in ministry. While there are many ways of framing leadership, we will be using one particular angle – that of leadership as servant. For this session, servant leadership will center around three big ideas: 1) Ministry is first and foremost about God and God's work in the world; 2) We, as Christians, are empowered and invited by the Holy Spirit, to join God in God's work in the world; and 3) Servant leadership has particular skills that come with it. We are excited that you are taking the time to step out of your daily activities and to step into learning about and reflecting on leading ministry with young people.

Open in Prayer

Core:

Part 1) it's about God

Show Video Clip: Part 1) it's about God (*see "script" below*)

Tiger McLuen, one of the co-writers of this curriculum series, is famous for describing ministry leadership in this way, "Leadership is not about you. And it's about you." And he's right. Leadership in a ministry context is primarily about what God is up to and how God works through ordinary people and situations to do extraordinary things. Think for a moment about some of the most impactful leaders in the Bible (like Abraham and Moses and David in the Old Testament or Peter and Paul and Timothy in the New Testament). If it were about them and their abilities – or faithfulness or intellect or ... you get the point – God's work in the world would have been hampered. Servant leadership is different than other leadership models our world lifts up. One of the core differences is that servant leaders seek to serve the "master's" work or mission. In God's case, God's desire is to be in relationship with all of creation so that all may have life and have it abundantly. God's work, then, is about fostering abundant life. How? through relationships – people with God and people with one another. We as leaders both participate in fostering such relationships and attend to our

own relationship with God. Keeping those two in balance can be hard. Remembering that God's bigger than any one of us is key!

Activity: Choose a leader in the Bible and reflect on their relationship with God. How would you characterize it? Was it smooth sailing or rocky seas? Was it problem free or a journey into a new frontier? In the midst of their leading, how did they tend to their relationship with God? What happened when they lost that focus? What, if any, practices were important to them? How might those practices have fostered their relationship with God?

Part 2) it's about discipleship

Activity: Read John 21:15-19. Working with another person, make a list of leadership ideas that you see in this text. Thinking about the context of these verses (Jesus appearing to his disciples after the resurrection), what do you think Jesus is trying to communicate to the disciples? (Have pairs share their ideas with the group and see both the common threads and the different perspectives.)

Show Video Clip: Part 2) it's about discipleship (*see "script" below*)

There are so many things that can be lifted out of these verses in John's gospel. Within our conversation today, let's lift out two. First, Jesus is speaking primarily to Peter. If you remember from the larger story, it wasn't that long ago that Jesus predicted that Peter would betray Jesus three times the night he was arrested...and indeed, in spite of the fact that Peter disagreed with him, Peter did betray him three times. This encounter comes on the other side of that reality. Jesus KNOWS that Peter betrayed him...and he doesn't worry about. He knows his sin and rather than confront him, he asks him a relational question, "Do you love me?" That seems to be the core out of which a leader is to operate. And it's not just Peter that's asked that question, but so are all of us...leaders in the church today. Second, Once Peter responds, Jesus gives him his "orders" or work assignment – feed my lambs. What does that mean? Tend to my people, tend to my world, share my love with those around you. So, not only is everyone asked, but all are invited...invited to join into relational work – work that is centered on our love for God and out of that love our love for one another.

Part 3) it's about particular things leaders do

Activity: Go back to the lists you developed in our opening activity and review what you wrote, thinking this time about leading in a ministry setting. Make a list of several things that are important for ministry leaders to tend to or pay attention to.

Show Video Clip: Part 3) it's about particular things leaders do (*see "script" below*)

OK, that's great, but what does it look like? How do I "feed God's lambs"? Great question. Leading, in Jesus day and in ours, is complex and multi-faceted. For our conversation today, I'd like to suggest three groups of skills and practices that servant leaders need to "tend" if they are going to feed God's lambs.

First, *Administrative gifts and practices*. These gifts include things like: Planning and organizing God-centered ministry, implementing ministry that fosters discipleship and helps people discover a Christian way of life, tending to logistics of ministry that free people to be in relationship and learn and grow and serve together, and creating a safe environment where relationships with God and one another can be nurtured. For those of you interested in exploring some of these gifts and practices, we will have other sessions that address things like strategic planning and planning for the unexpected.

Second, *Communication and Interpersonal gifts and practices*. These gifts include things like: learning how to read situations within one's ministry context and discover what it means to "feed God's lambs" in that time or place, interpersonal skills or relating with people one-on-one, leading various types of groups – be they small groups or large groups, and developing and carrying out a communication strategy to share what's happening, with the leaders, youth and their families. Two of these areas will be addressed in the sessions: leading small groups and faith conversations.

Third, *Ministry gifts and practices*. These gifts include things like: Attending to one's own journey of faith (which we have already talked about here), nurturing and leading discipleship practices with young people – leading things like Bible study, prayer, worship, service, etc., helping others discover their own giftedness and create opportunities for using those gifts, and creating practices for reflection on ministry activities and how they relate to nurturing faith and a life of discipleship. Resources for addressing these areas are plentiful and the website has a list of some great ones to explore if you want to go deeper into any of these areas. *(end of script)*

Before we come to a close today, let's take some time for you to reflect on where your gifts and skills lie in each of these three areas. Using the reflection sheet provided, note what areas are a strength, what areas you have done and/or are comfortable leading, and what areas scare you or are brand new for you.

Then complete these three sentences:

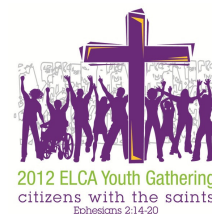
- 1) My strongest areas of leadership are....,
- 2) I want to grow in.... And
- 3) I will tend my relationship with God by

Closing

Servant leadership – remember it’s not about you and it’s about you. Your role as a servant leader is to help God’s people join in the work God is already up to in this world. It’s about tending your own discipleship journey AND helping young people do the same. Yes, there are some gifts and skills and practices that help us do that. But what’s at the heart of being a servant leader is - You love God and seek to feed God’s lambs.

Close in Prayer

**This curriculum was developed for the Practice Discipleship Project, an initiative of the 2012 ELCA Youth Gathering (www.elca.org/gathering) in partnership with the ELCA Youth Ministry Network (www.elcaymnet.org). While primary authorship belongs to the author noted above, this is a collective work of the Practice Discipleship writing team: Dr. Terri Elton (Luther Seminary: www.luthersem.edu), Dennis “Tiger” McLuen (Youth Leadership: www.youthleadership.org), and Dr. Jeremy Myers (Augsburg College: www.augsburg.edu). Permission is given to use these resources in your local context, so long as no organization or individual profits from the use of these materials.*



Reflection Sheet

On a scale of 1 to 5 (lowest to highest) note your comfort in doing the following things:

Administrative

- Planning and organizing ministry 1 2 3 4 5
 - I enjoy laying out a calendar of ministry activities for an extended period of time
 - I know that effective ministry requires pre-planning and team work
 - I know how to plan ahead
 - I can organize people and give them direction
- Implementing ministry 1 2 3 4 5
 - I can delegate tasks and share the responsibility of leading a ministry event
 - I know how to take an idea and make it a reality
 - I can create steps for myself or others to follow
 - I know how to invite others into leading ministry
- Logistics of ministry 1 2 3 4 5
 - I like to take care of the details when carrying out a ministry event
 - I feel a sense of accomplishment when the details of an event are covered
 - I can see when little things are not being done and I step and help
 - I prefer taking care of tasks on a to-do-list
- Creating a safe environment 1 2 3 4 5
 - I know all students should feel safe when participating in ministry activities and seek to make that happen
 - I know how to create an environment where adults and youth can safely nurture spiritual relationship
 - I am aware of warnings signs when adults are being inappropriately with youth
 - I know what to do if a youth shares that they have been physically violated

Communication and Interpersonal

- Reading the situation or ministry context 1 2 3 4 5
 - I can tell if an event is going well or not and can adjust my leadership accordingly
 - I can sense the spirit of a group of people
 - It is important to me to get feedback on ministry events from the participants
 - I like to explore what has been done previously before I implement a new idea
 - I seek feedback from various people in the congregation
- Relating with people one-on-one 1 2 3 4 5
 - I enjoy talking with youth one-on-one
 - I seek out youth standing outside a group and initiate conversation
 - I get energy from interpersonal conversations
 - I know how to strike up conversation with almost anyone

- Leading small groups 1 2 3 4 5
 - I enjoy getting students to interact with each other in a small group
 - When I lead a small group the time goes by quickly
 - I rarely use prepared material when I lead a small group
 - I'm comfortable following the questions of youth in a small group setting
- Leading large groups 1 2 3 4 5
 - I am comfortable speaking in front of large groups
 - I know how to get the attention of a large group of youth
 - I'm energized after speaking to a large group
 - I can conceptualize how to lead a game or activities with a large group of people
- Developing and carrying out a communication strategy 1 2 3 4 5
 - I understand the importance of communicating with youth and their parents
 - I use multiple communication methods and communicate often
 - I can adjust communication methods depending on the audience or message
 - I am able to think strategically about how to share information

Ministry

- Attending to one's own journey of faith 1 2 3 4 5
 - I value and practice regular worship participation
 - I set aside time for myself to nurture faith, even when I'm busy
 - I sense when I am spiritually dry and seek to change it
 - I know what feeds me spiritually
- Nurturing and leading discipleship practices with young people 1 2 3 4 5
 - I know how to lead Bible studies with youth that engage youth
 - I am comfortable praying with and teaching youth about prayer
 - I believe worship is central to discipleship and seek ways of making worship come alive for youth
 - I know how to guide youth in service activities
 - I am comfortable talking with youth about what they believe in God
- Helping others discover and create opportunities for using those gifts 1 2 3 4 5
 - I recognize gifts and passions in youth and tell them
 - I enjoy giving youth the opportunity to try leading in new areas
 - I encourage youth to explore a wide variety of ministry areas
 - I recognize leadership gifts in youth and seek to nurture those gifts
- Creating practices for reflection on ministry activities 1 2 3 4 5
 - I value the importance of evaluation and processing after an event and know how to lead such processes
 - I know how to create opportunities for youth to reflect on ministry experiences
 - I regularly create feedback mechanisms on various aspects of ministry